DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 783 FL 005 197

AUTHOR Burkhard, Marianne
TITLE Switzerland: Economy, Language and Politics.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; Bilingualism; *Demography; Economic Development; *Economic Progress; French; *German; *Governmental Structure; Industry; Italian; Language Planning; Natural Resources; *Official Languages; Politics; Standard Spoken Usage; Written Language
IDENTIFIERS Romansh; *Switzerland

ABSTRACT

An overview of the economic policy, political structure, and four official languages of Switzerland is presented. The following topics are discussed: (1) economic expansion without natural resources, (2) linguistic diversity, (3) Swiss-German, and (4) politics and governmental organization. (PMP)

Marianne Burkhard
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois 61801

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 098783

SWITZERLAND -- ECONOMY, LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

For the foreigner the name of Switzerland is too often connected with poster pictures and concepts -- cows peacefully grazing in an alpine landscape, majestic peaks towering into an incredibly blue sky, chocolate and glittering watches, William Tell and his heroic fight for independence, carefree vacationing in a land of enchanting scenery. But in order to get a glimpse at the reality of Switzerland one must turn to other aspects.

Switzerland is an odd country. Its very existence defies any natural unity since it extends into the 3 different areas of German, French and Italian culture and comprises 4 major linguistic groups--German, French, Italian and Romansh. These principal groups again are split into an amazing number of smaller groups differing from each other in customs, dialects, temperament. Thus, the country's small external size is counterbalanced by an internal diversity. Each group is proud of its peculiarities, and the many friendly rivalries between cities, towns, valleys show how mich importance people attribute to their own distinct way of life.

The desire to preserve linguistic diversity and variety of customs to such an unusual extend has two roots: historical tradition and the conviction that a small state must be able to rely on every one of its small groups, that even the smallest part fulfills an important function. Mutual esteem, the recognition and tolerance of differences are the vital basis for building a reasonable consensus among the larger and smaller elements; and this consensus is an everyday necessity for the functioning of the Swiss state.

External limitation turns into a stimulus for internal variety and differentiation. The size of almost everything in Switzerland is small, but the number of different items is large,

FL 005 197

and importance is attached to even the smallest one. The absence of any large external resources forced the Swiss to value small things and to develop an internal resourcefulness of their own. This contrast--external limitation vs. internal variety--is one of the most characteristic marks of Switzerland's economy, culture and politics.

Economic expansion without natural resources

Switzerland is a very small country. It covers 15 942 sqmi, its greatest length is 226 mi (W-E, Geneva-St. Margrethen), its greatest breadth 137 mi (N-S, Bargen-Schaffhausen-Chiasso). In 1970, the population numbered 6'269'783. Comparative figures: Illinois covers 56 400 sqmi., and has a population of about 11 million. Only 9 US-States are smaller than Switzerland, namely Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont. Switzerland is about twice the size of New Jersey (7836 sqmi.).

This limited space of Switzerland is even more curtailed by the mountains and a large number of lakes. Little more than 50% of the land can be used for agriculture; 23.6% is absolutely unproductive, i.e. consists of rocks and glaciers (they number more than 1000) and does not even yield grazing land for sheep and goats. The share of unproductive land in other alpine countries is considerably smaller: in Austria it is 15%, in Germany 13%. There are 1484 lakes in Switzerland and more than 13 000 smaller bodies of water.

The country is divided into 22 cantons comparable in organization to the US-States. 3 of the cantons are split into half-cantons (Basel-Land and Basel-Stadt, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Innerrhoden, Unterwalden in Nidwalden and Obwalden). The sizes of the cantons range from 92 sqmi. (Zug) to 2745 sqmi. (Graubünden), but only five cantons are larger than 1000 sqmi (Graubünden-2745, Bern-2659, Valais-2020, Vaud-1240, Ticino-1085).

What do the 6 million Swiss do in this small country? Topographical conditions do not allow large scale farming, and there are neither minerals nor oil. Nature offers only two basic elements for economic exploitation: water and beautiful scenery. Water is used for the production of electricity; it is the so-called "white coal" of Switzerland. There are more than 300 hydro-electric plants and a few thermo-nuclear plants. Electricity is the Swiss energy, the Swiss train system is fully electrified and industry runs exclusively on electricity. The other natural element for expansion is the landscape whose attractions helped develop a flourishing tourism

The most important basis for Switzerland's economic expansion, however, is non-material, it is the people's will to work. Limited space and absence of natural resources challenges everybody's work energy, namely his endurance and imagination. Because of the lack of raw materials the manufacturing of imported materials had to be developed. The manufacturing industries have two important characteristics: production of small items and precision work, both results of Switzerland's natural poverty.

The main industries are:

- manufacturing of textiles (silk, cotton, synthetic fabrics)
- watches, clocks
- appliances
- tools
- precision and optical instruments
- pharmaceutical, chemical products
- machines up to locomotives, Diesel-engines, turbines, generators

The chocolate industry, although best known, cannot compete in size and importance with the above-mentioned industries.

Another way to counteract the lack of raw material is the work with money. Switzerland, and especially Zurich, is a center

for stock trading and banking. A sound economy and a long tradition of neutrality favor Switzerland's role on the money-market.

In another significant respect Swiss industry operates on a small scale. Factories and concerns are often small, and mammoth plants are relatively few in number. A full third of the Swiss work force is employed in plants with less than 50 workers.

Important for this type of industry is good schooling and a thorough vocational training. Switzerland has developed an effective system of vocational schools where young people get the theoretical background for the trade they learn during apprenticeship. At the end of the 3 or 4-year apprenticeship the vocational schools administer general final exams covering the essential material in practice and theory, thus certifying with a nationally recognized diploma the candidates' sound knowledge of their profession.

The emphasis on hard work created--or at least promoted--a strong work-ethic. This attitude is also supported by Protestantism to which about 50% of the Swiss population adhere. This accent on work and its necessity for life also reflects the realistic and practical outlook which is typical for the Swiss. Working hard and well is crucial for them; such work compensates for the poverty of the land and makes Switzerland a strong competitor on the world market. However, this work-ethic has also a negative side since it favors a frustrating perfectionism, and it also creates an often negative atmosphere for the development of the arts.

Because of Switzerland's small size the newest problem of European industry, the problem of foreign workers, has become a very serious problem. Foreign workers constitute 1/4 of the work force and 10% of the population. About 60% of these workers are Italians, the rest comes from Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. Since they have little or no training they do the menial

jobs for which there are no Swiss applicants. Hotels and restaurants and many public services--e.g. garbage collection, street construction and street cleaning, hospitals (kitchen and cleaning jobs)--depend heavily on the foreigners. Their integration into Switzerland is difficult because of vast differences in social standards and between the Swiss work-ethic and the southern-european attitude which considers rigid and perfect work less important than a halfway enjoyable life. The uncontrolled influx of foreigners in the late 50s and early 60s created a prejudice against the foreigners and strengthened nationalistic trends.

Linguistic diversity

With regard to languages, small Switzerland again comprises an extraordinary variety: there are four official languages and each one of them exists in numerous dialects.

The four official languages

Four languages are spoken in Switzerland: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Their distribution is as follows:

	only Swiss population	Swiss & Italian workers
German	74.4%	69.3%
French	20.2	18.9
Italian	4.1	9.5
Romansh	1.0	0.9

All four languages are official, and this means that they have equal status. The Constitution as well as any federal laws, bills and announcements must be written in all four of them so that everybody can read them in his or her native language.

How does this linguistic diversity affect every-day life? A few examples shall show that the plurality of languages is present everywhere and for everybody in Switzerland.

- Signs in railstations, trains, cable-cars, in short: in public transportation carry every inscription in 3 languages--German, French and Italian. Today, in bigger cities and tourist centers English is added for the tourists. Explanations in timetables appear in the 3 languages too as well as the abbreviations of the federal train company. Examples:

  Raucher / Fumeurs / Fumatori

  Überschreiten der Geleise verboten / Ne pas traverser les voies/ E vietato traversare i binari

  SBB Schweizerische Bundesbahnen
  CFF Chemins de Fers Fédéraux
  FFS Ferrovie federali Svizzere

- In school, children learn at least one other language, sometimes starting as early as in fourth grade. The learning of this language is compulsory and necessary. Because of their larger diffusion, German and French turn out to be the languages spoken and learned most often.

  German-speaking Swiss learn French as their first foreign language

  French-speaking Swiss learn German as their first foreign language

  Italian-speaking Swiss learn French as their first foreign language

  Romansh-speaking Swiss learn German as their first foreign language

  People in business, from the secretaries on up to the director, must know at least one foreign language, and in general, two are required (German or French and English), in many cases knowledge of Italian or Spanish is required too.

- In the Federal Assembly, the National Council, the Council of States, the Federal Council, and in committees, German and French are spoken without translation. And the radio and TV addresses of the President of the Federal Council--traditonal on New Year's Day and August 1, the national holiday, are recorded in the 4 languages. Usually, the president delivers the address himself in at least 2 languages, and translations are provided for the others. In 1972, the President, Nello Celio, recorded it himself in 3 languages--in his native Italian,

in French and in German in which he is also fluent.

A delicate balance between the linguistic groups has to be maintained so as to avoid too much bad feelings which then could erupt into real problems. The Swiss have managed over the past 125 years--since they created a unified federal state in 1848--to respect each other. One of the most important elements for keeping internal peace is the fact that the relatively large German-speaking majority recognized the necessity of not only respecting the smaller groups, but of giving in to them often. Thus, German-speaking Swiss learn more and better French than the French-speaking Swiss learn German. While the federal government is located in Bern, a German-speaking area, the Federal (Supreme) Court is located in French-speaking Lausanne. Mutual respect and consideration is a continuous process. This is evident in the fact that today the Swiss have become aware of a longtime neglect of the Ticino, a small rural region; thus, plans are being made to build either one of the new universities or a graduate school for certain sciences in the Italian part of Switzerland.

Swiss-German-- or the bilingualism of Swiss-Germans

Although all four languages exist in a number of dialects the situation in the German part of Switzerland is unusual. The significant difference between the Swiss-German dialects and standard High German create a complex bilingual situation since the dialects are in many respects so different from standard High German that the latter is a foreign language which has to be learned in schools.

The Swiss-German dialect basically represents the German language of the Middle Ages. Some dialects in the alpine regions even conserve forms of Old High German--especially the dialects in the Upper Rhone Valley, the Bernese Oberland and the Valser dialects in Graubünden, i.e. in settlements by German-speaking people from the Rhone valley in the Romansh area, for example

Vals, Klosters, Davos a.o. Since the 13th century only one major change has occurred in the Swiss dialects: the simple preterit forms were lost, thus leaving these dialects with only two tense forms, present and present perfect. The following is a list of the main differences:

No diphthongization of i, u, ü mii--mein, sii--sein, glii--gleich (Adverb)
Huus--Haus, Muus--Maus
Hüüsli--Häuslein, Füür-Feuer

No monophthongization of ie, ue us
lieb pronounced as dipthongue
Spiegel
Stuel--Stuhl, Blueme--Blume, mues--muss
müese--müssen, chüel--kühl

Contracted verb forms: gaa--gehen, staa--stehen, laa--lassen
e.ps.pl: gönd (Zurich)/ güünd (Glarus)/ göi (Bern)
nëë--nehmen
gsii--gewesen, gnaa--genommen

Endings are quite different in Swiss German:

en feisse Maa--ein fetter Mann and einen fetten Mann
de feiss Maa--der fette Mann and den fetten Mann
e früntlichi Frau--eine freundliche Frau
die früntlich Frau--die freundliche Frau
es chliis Chind--ein kleines Kind
das chlii Chind--das kleine Kind
luschtigi Hünd--lustige Hunde
die luschtige Hünd--die lustigen Hunde

The use of the genitive case has almost ceased except in some preceding positions: s'Vaters Huet--Vaters Hut. In all other cases the dativ+possessive adjective or von+dative is used:

em Puur sini Arbet--die Arbeit des Bauern
der Mueter iri Chlüppli--die Wäscheklammern der Mutter
det ligget d'Büecher vo de Brüedere--dort liegen die Bücher der Brüder

And of course, the list of specific dialect words is extremely long. The vocabulary and the idioms of Swiss dialects also contain large number of French words or show the influence of French in idioms and in syntactic structures. Trottoir-Gehsteig, jupe-Rock, Chemineé-Feuerstelle, Konduktör-Schaffner are everyday words, also the mixture "merci viilmal"- vielen Dank. In Swiss-German one says "ich ha chalt" - mir ist, kalt, modeled after French "j'ai froid", and whenever a Swiss translates this directly into High German saying "ich habe kalt", Germans find it very funny.

Why is Swiss-German so different? There are two main reasons for this, a linguistic and a cultural one. The main vowel changes leading to standard High German did not penetrate the Swiss dialects. At the same time when monophthongization and diphthongization set in, when the northeastern German dialects gained more and more importance through the Prager Kanzleisprache and Luther's Bible translation, the small Swiss federation was fighting for its independence from the German Empire. Since 1500 this confederation of 13 small states was independent from the Emperor. The preservation of the dialects is just one expression of Swiss independence and individualism, or, in other words, of the Swiss aversion against any standardization.

Thus, the German part of Switzerland has a unique linguistic situation: the Swiss-Germans speak only in their dialect. Speaking dialect has no social implications--as for instance in Germany--; the professor and politician speak it as well as the worker and farmer. For all of them, the dialect is the natural spoken language. Standard High German is spoken only in formal situations: in school, university of other formal lectures, in church, in Parliament (the French and Italian Swiss understand High German, but not Swiss German), in court, or whenever Germans are present who most often do not understand the Swiss dialects. Thus, the professor lectures, the teacher teaches in High German, but outside the classroom he speaks only dialect with his students. The average Swiss does not feel very comfortable when he has to

speak High German because it is not his natural spoken expression; he is afraid of making mistakes (and there are many possibilities for it) and he is very self-conscious of his clearly recognizable accent of which Germans like to make fun.

However, as soon as a Swiss-German turns to writing he will do it in High German. Written communication uses exclusively High German except for about 50% of the children's books and a very small dialect literature. Significantly enough, the Swiss call High German also "Schriftdeutsch"--written German. Thus, every Swiss finds himself in an almost schizophrenic situation: he never writes the language he speaks, and he seldom speaks the language he writes. I would , for instance, never dream of speaking High German to my family or my Swiss friends (unless Germans were present), but whenever we communicate in written form, even within Switzerland, we do it in High German.

When children learn to speak they learn their dialect, and they do not understand High German which they have to learn in school when they learn to read and to write. I cannot remember how I learned it, but I do remember how in grade school, we tried again and again to lapse into our familiar dialect, hoping the teacher would go along with it. For many Swiss-Germans, speaking High German never looses this taste of early school compulsion, and Germany's history under Hitler understandably enhanced Swiss aversion against High German.

Swiss-German writers face the same problem. Frisch and Dürrenmatt speak their dialect just as any other Swiss, but they cannot write it if they want to address a larger audience. And if they choose to write about Switzerland and her people they have to let their Swiss characters speak High German, a language they ordinarily do not speak. However, this complicated situation has always given Swiss-German literature a special linguistic flavor, and writers of our time use it ever more consciously as an artistic means.

Political diversity

Switzerland's diversity is reflected in political life and in political structures too. A plurality of political parties, flexibility in political processes and a lack of absolute power concentration in one office are necessary elements for the maintaining of the balance between the different groups in the country. This balance is not easy to achieve, and at times, it fails in certain parts. The Canton of Bern, for instance, has not yet been able to solve the deepening differences between the Frency-speaking Jura and the German-speaking part of the Canton.

Nine different parties are represented in the Federal Assembly (Congress), among them is the Workers' Party, the Swiss Communist Party, with 5 representatives. The Federal Assembly consists of two Houses, the National Council (comparable to the House of Representatives) with 200 members, and the Council of States (Senate) with 44 members, i.e. 2 for each Canton. Both Houses have equal status. The plurality of political life is again evident in the fact that in the last election for the Federal Assembly about 1600 candidates ran for the 244 seats.

The Executive Branch of the government is the Federal Council whose 7 members are elected by the Federal Assembly. The 7 Federal Councillors represent the 3 largest parties--Radical Democrats, Socialists, Christian Democrats--and also different regions of the country. The Federal Councillors can be compared to Ministers; however, there is neither a Prime Minister nor a President with special power. All seven have the same status, each year another one is President of the Federal Council and of Switzerland as a whole. But this office holds no special political power, the President assumes merely more representational duties.

The Federal Council or the individual Councillors have no power to veto a bill passed by the Federal Assembly. The only body who can veto such a bill is the people: with 30 000 signatures any citizen or citizens' group can ask for a referendum against any action taken by the Federal Assembly. If the referendum gets a majority of the popular vote, the Federal Assembly's action is vetoed. For especially important items not only a majority of the popular vote, but also a majority of the Cantons is required.

There is also a long list of items that must be voted on by the people after passage in the Federal Assembly, from constitutional amendments, matters of national policy to appropriations for the defense. Because the women's right to vote on the federal level required an amendment of the Constitution the entire male population of Switzerland had to vote on the matter, and for this reason, the amendment, passed by the Federal Assembly, failed several times in the referendum until it finally passed in 1971. To my knowledge, Switzerland is the only country where the women's right to vote had to pass in a popular referendum. Important decisions in national and foreign policy are also subject to referendum--e.g. whether Switzerland should join the League of Nations (1920, which it did).